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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002816

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TAGS: PGOV PINS ASEC PTER IZ

SUBJECT: AFTERMATH OF MUTHANNA GOVERNOR,S ASSASSINATION

REF: BAGHDAD 2783

Classified By: PRT LEADER PHIL EGGER, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Muthanna Reporting cable.

¶2. (C) Summary: Since the the August 20 killing of Muthanna Governor Hassani, local officials have tightened security and there have been few reports of violence. After the three day period of mourning, the Provincial Council will select the new governor. Top tier candidates include: Mohammad Zayadi, of the powerful Zayad tribe, current PC chairman Ahmed Marzook, and Qassam Hassan Auda, an ISCI/Badr member of the PC. Though one local staff member reported that many at Governor Hassani,s funeral blamed JAM, perhaps with some tribal assistance, for the killing, we currently have no evidence to support this assertion. End Summary.

Details Emerge on the Attack

¶3. (C) Details of the Governor's killing have emerged in the days following the attack. On the morning of 20 Hassani was assassinated by an IED emplaced near a fuel station on his way from his home in Rumaytha to Samawah, the provincial capital (reftel). The attack, on a busy road, managed to destroy the Governor,s unarmored vehicle and no others. One local staff member familiar with the location of the attack believes it would have been nearly impossible for the device to be planted on such a crowded road without the acquiescence of some members of the Al-Jalabtah sub-tribe, who dominates the area. The Al-Jalabtah is a sub-tribe of the Albu Hassan tribe (to which the late Governor Hassani belonged) but the tribe is divided into pro-JAM and anti-JAM factions and loyalties.. According to the same local staff member, most people at Governor Hassani,s funeral procession this morning blamed JAM, with the assistance of the Al-Jalabtah, but there is not any evidence to support this theory at this time.

The Aftermath and Security in Muthanna

¶4. (C) According to Australian aerial imagery and local staff members, the province is stable, with a large number of armed police checkpoints appearing throughout Samawah over the past 24 hours. Australian Commanding Officer LTC Ellwood told PRT officers on 8/21 that he had offered assistance to the Deputy Governor, but it was &graciously& rejected as unnecessary. (Note: The Australian battlegroup has &overwatch& responsibility for Muthanna.) On the afternoon of 20 August, Deputy Governor Dhuwani chaired a meeting of the Provincial Council and established a special security committee to assist in maintaining order. PRT learned from local sources that on the evening of 20 August masked men entered the Medina mosque, a reputed Sadrists stronghold, and forced everyone to leave, but we have no other reports of violence in Muthanna, so far. At 0700 on 21 August, Australian imagery confirmed the Governor,s funeral procession had proceeded from Samawah to Rumaytha. From there it will proceed to Najaf. All government departments have been closed for three days of mourning. Neither

Australian forces nor the PRT will enter Muthanna until the new Governor is announced.

Likely Successors to the Governorship

¶5. (C) Because the late Governor was affiliated with ISCI/Badr, ISCI would seem to have the inside track on his replacement. Qassim Hassan Auda, a PC member from ISCI/Badr would be well placed to win according to one local staff member with extensive PC contacts. However, in Muthanna armed supporters -- either from tribes, the government or militias -- are very helpful, so the following are also top tier candidates:

--Mohammad Radi Sultan Al-Zayadi hails from one of Muthanna,s most powerful tribes, and has the backing of tribal members on the PC, as well as strong patronage relationships with contractors involved in reconstruction.

--Ahmed Marzouk Al-Salal is currently the PC chairman, and he benefits from a coalition of support in Rumaytha, as well as support from the late Governor,s allies. He too, has a substantial number of armed men at his disposal.

-- There are three medium tier candidates, all of whom are unlikely to be selected for their power bases, but who could emerge as compromise candidates if the front runners are deadlocked against one another. Mohammad Hassouni, PC member and chair of the reconstruction committee, has support from Da,wa, and some non-aligned PC members. Qassim Jabr is a respected power broker on the PC, but he lacks sufficient popular or militia support. Finally, Jassim Sharrad Ubeed, the Deputy PC Chair, is an ally of Mohammad al-Zayadi and could be chosen if Zayadi chooses not to pursue the position.

¶6. (C) Officials in the provincial government informed us that Abdul Hussein Mohammed al-Dhalimi, leader of ISCI in

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Muthanna and a PC member, has been suggested by some of his PC colleagues as a strong candidate.. Sheikh Assad Al-Dhuwani is the dark horse candidate, respected for his religious credentials and independence, but he probably will not be selected because of the latter.

Likely ISF and Tribal Responses

¶7. (C) In the view of most PRT contacts, local residents have confidence that COL Ali, of the Criminal Intelligence Unit, with the backing of the tribes and government, would investigate the crime vigorously and would catch the perpetrators. He will likely target known JAM members. We have two reports from local staff that members of the Albu Hassan tribe originally sought revenge against the perceived perpetrators but were talked into using official, legal channels instead by members of the powerful Bani Zraige tribe. If COL Ali is unsuccessful in apprehending the fugitives, we believe the Albu Hassan may resort to more traditional forms of tribal justice) i.e. demands for blood debt backed by the threat of assault on those held responsible.

Comment: Who Was Responsible?

¶8. (C) The conventional wisdom at the moment suggests that OMS/JAM, perhaps with the help of some Jalabtah members with JAM sympathies, were responsible for this as a power-play against SCIRI/Badr in retaliation for their formation of a national parliamentary &Moderate Bloc8 that excludes the Sadists and implicitly threatens JAM with a collaborative Coalition-ISCI/Badr assault in advance of the upcoming provincial elections. Certainly, the timing of the attack, nine days after the assassination of the ISCI Governor of Qadasiyah is suspicious. But it may not be that simple, and we lack sufficient evidence to make a judgment. It is possible that Hassani,s assassination was the result of internal politics or tribal feuding. In his last meeting with LTC Ellwood, the Governor said, &I,ve got a good grip on the tribes.8 However, tribal alliances and support are

ephemeral, and Hassani's long tenure as governor had almost certainly resulted in the creation of enemies, both in and out of government

¶ 9. (C) Comment continued: We would note that Hassani was riding in an unarmored vehicle and apparently traveling along a very predictable route and time from his home in Rumaytha to the provincial capital. While we do not as yet have any reliable information about the type of IED used in the attack, the use of a soft vehicle and the apparent disregard for basic security procedures almost certainly contributed to the success of this terrorist attack. LTC Elwood told us he had raised through his chain of command a request to provide an armored vehicle for motorcade use. End Comment.

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